

Editorial

As this issue goes to press, the effects of the bombings in Brussels on the 22nd of March are still visible. As many opinion-makers have suggested, the attacks are linked to problems both local and global: terrorist networks in the Brussels area, the ongoing conflict in Syria, the rise of IS, and the refugee crisis. Local problems often find their origin in geopolitical forces; borders are simultaneously being crossed and reaffirmed; protest rises as EU policies, including those of gender and racial equality, are being questioned. In light of these and other events, the focus on gender and diversity seems to be more important than ever to our critical thinking, our scholarly research, and daily lives. How do we respond to the events happening around us? How do we frame them? What are the implicit and explicit assumptions we make? It is in this context that the *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies (DiGeSt)* continues to be a forum for scholarly debate and critical reflection on issues relating to gender and diversity, both of the past and the present, in Belgium and abroad.

In her article “Judith Butler in Belgium: Reflections on Public Grief and Precarity in the Wake of the Paris Attacks”, **Holly Brown** comments on Judith Butler’s visit to Belgium on 16 November 2015. What was meant to be a celebratory occasion – Butler received an honorary doctorate from the University of Liège – was overshadowed by the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015. Building on Butler’s post-9/11 works *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, Brown analyses displays of public grief on social media in the wake of the Paris attacks. She highlights the “differential distribution of public mourning”, where we mourn the deaths of some but not of others, by closely examining two Facebook features used by thousands of people immediately after the attacks: the “Safety Check” button that alerts Facebook contacts that one is safe and the French tricolor filter applied to profile pictures expressing sympathy or public grief. From a Butlerian perspective, the use of these features illustrates different degrees of “precariousness” or vulnerability, as Brown convincingly demonstrates. Being invoked for Paris and not, for instance, for Beirut, they signal the division between the West and “the Other”. Brown extends and critiques Butler’s argument by applying it to a specific context and a new medium.

Continuing the discourse of intersectionality central to the previous double issue of *DiGeSt*, **Anna Safuta** discusses the perceived opposition between materialist and

post-structuralist paradigms within feminist theory in her article “Migrant Domestic Services and the Revival of Materialist Feminism: Asking the Other ‘Other Question’ as a New Research Method”. Rather than maintaining the dichotomy, she calls for an integrated perspective where we ask materialist *and* post-structuralist questions. One perspective is not better suited than the other to study specific phenomena; what matters is whether and how we include both. As Safuta shows through a case study of female migrant domestic workers in the “care chain” between Belgium, Poland, and the Ukraine, materialist perspectives alert us to the structures of inequality that inform the experiences of women in domestic service, even when these women do not always explicitly draw attention to material factors themselves. They can be included in the course of the research or applied to the results *ex facto*, as in the presented case study. In both cases, they reveal exploitation, where other, post-structuralist discourses only see the “labour of love”, that is, voluntary commitment and emotional attachment. “Systematically asking the other (i.e. materialist) other question”, according to Safuta, “will ensure that both the ‘identity’ and ‘materialist’ aspects of a single phenomenon, experience or narrative are accounted for”. The article makes a theoretical as well as a practical contribution.

An intersectional method is also adopted by **Wim Peumans** in his contribution “The Moral Breakdown between Religion and Sexuality in Narratives of Muslim Gays, Bisexuals, and Lesbians in Belgium”. Through two case studies of LGB Muslim youths in Belgium, he critiques the view that religion and sexuality are always commensurate. Rather than focusing on how Muslims reconcile religion and same-sex sexuality, Peumans highlights the “moral breakdowns” that seem to be part of a gay Muslim identity. As Peumans demonstrates, moral breakdowns are not one-off experiences but are often lived through again and again. They are embodied experiences that do not necessarily lead to a unified self, as often suggested in the literature on “coming out”, but that show a self that continues to be “ambivalent, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory and fragmented.” Peumans’s account extends beyond the specific case study in that the discourse of multiple moral breakdowns can be read as a critique on the notion of the liberal, rational self, central to many studies dealing with gender and diversity.

Jo Tondeur, Sarah Van de Velde, Hans Vermeersch, and Mieke Van Houtte examine the correlation between gender and computer attitudes for university students in their article “Gender Differences in the ICT Profile of University Students: A Quantitative Analysis”. Through a large-scale quantitative study, they show that there is no significant difference between men and women’s computer attitudes in an educational setting. Although men have more positive general computer attitudes, there is no significant difference when computers are used for educational purposes. According to the authors, this is due to the “pragmatic stance” of women

who are neither “technophobes” nor “technophiles” but “techno-realists”: they become more interested in computers when there is a clear, utilitarian purpose involved. Just as important as the results of this study are its qualifications that highlight expectations concerning gender roles, contextual differences, and sociocultural practices. For instance, it is mentioned that women have a more generally positive attitude towards education, which would explain the difference between general computer attitudes and those used in a specific, educational context.

DiGeSt continues its tradition of publishing short notes on recent and classic critical studies on gender and diversity that are of particular significance to a researcher’s ongoing project. Through reflection and original research, we want to stimulate a critical dialogue in gender and diversity studies. The contributors to this issue’s “What are you reading?” section are **Elien Arckens**, **Warda El-Kaddouri**, **Anaïs Van Ertvelde**, **Nella van den Brandt**, and **Sarah Posman**. These researchers introduce the reader to works that deal with topics as wide as queer sites of trauma, Muslim identities in Germany, “fat studies”, *mati work* in the Afro-Surinamese diaspora, and American feminism of the 1970s. They highlight the impact of a specific work on their ongoing research, and discuss its relevance for the wider field in which their research can be situated.

As *DiGeSt* celebrates its third birthday, it undergoes a number of changes. We are glad to welcome six new members to the editorial board: Maaheen Ahmed, Tom Claes, Sander De Ridder, Frederik Dhaenens, Sarah Van de Velde, and Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe. We also want to thank Marianne Van Remoortel and Evi Ceuleers, who are moving on to other projects. Liselotte Vandenbussche and Griet Roets are stepping down as editor-in-chief and editorial assistant and will be replaced by Birgit Van Puymbroeck and Katrien De Graeve respectively. We want to thank Liselotte and Griet for putting *DiGeSt* on the critical map, and are reassured that they will continue to serve on the editorial board. *DiGeSt* continues to be committed to publishing new and innovative research on gender and diversity. In order to better guide the reader, it now includes abstracts of the main contributions.

The next issue of *DiGeSt* will be a special issue on Silence, Gender, and Diversity, edited by Pieter Verstraete and Josephine Hoegaerts.

Birgit Van Puymbroeck, editor-in-chief